

Low-Tech, Low-Cost Gadgets for Your Pronunciation Toolbox

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Why do you need pronunciation tools?

- Teaching pronunciation, like any craft, is easier and works better if you have the right tools.
- “Show, don’t just tell” is a good motto. Students learn best when material is presented in many different ways. Tools that students can see or manipulate are valuable visual and kinesthetic teaching aids.

What’s in my pronunciation toolbox?



Syllable blobs: Use big and small glass or plastic shapes, dried beans, beads, or other large and small objects to represent stressed and unstressed syllables. Have students make models of stress patterns for words.

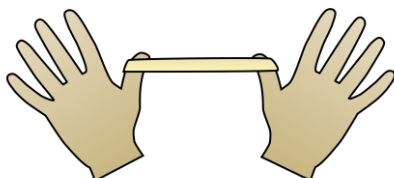
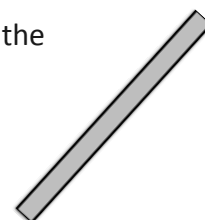
Pipe cleaners: Have students model the intonation of sentences. Pipe cleaners are perfect because they hold their shape but can be reshaped and reused.

Cheaper: Use string, strips of paper, or any other long, flexible material. Foam pool noodles are fun, though bulky and less flexible.



Drinking straws:

- To practice intonation, have students pretend they’re conducting an orchestra with the straw as a baton. Wave the straw up and down as their voice rises and falls.
- When practicing /w/, /kw/, and /uw/, tighten lips around a straw to encourage lip rounding. Blowing bubbles (or pretending to) also works well for lip rounding.



Rubber bands: Use thick, strong rubber bands for this. Have students stretch them to emphasize stressed syllables in words, prominent words in sentences, or tense vowels contrasted with lax vowels.



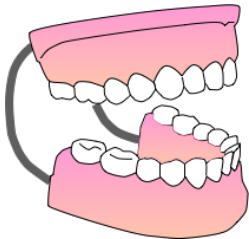
Cheaper: Have students clasp their hands together tightly or hold them loosely to get the same effect.



Balloons: These can be a great model of how our lungs and vocal cords work. Blow up a balloon and let the air flow out freely—like a voiceless sound. Stretch the top of the balloon and let the air flow out with a squeal—like a voiced sound.

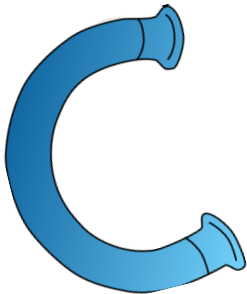
Mirrors: It’s not always easy for students to feel whether their lips are rounded or whether their tongue is touching their teeth, but with a mirror they can see.

Cheaper for you: If students have cell phones, have them use the camera to see themselves.



Dental model: Show students what’s happening inside their mouths. Use your hand as a “tongue” to show the articulation of sounds, with or without a “tongue puppet” made of felt or a sock. (OK, this one’s not so cheap, but it’s really useful.)

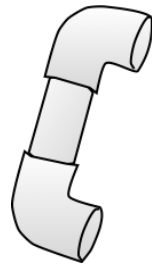
Cheaper: Make your own dental model. (See attached instructions.)



Listening tubes: These are sold under the names Whispy Reader, Toobaloo, WhisperPhone, Hear Myself Sound Phone, and others. Hold them like a telephone receiver and speak into one end. Hear your own voice more clearly while background noise is blocked out.

Cheaper: Make homemade listening tubes from PVC pipe.

Cheapest: Fold an “origami” version from heavy paper (pattern attached). To save your own time, have students do the cutting and folding.



Where can you get tools for your pronunciation toolbox?

- Look for materials and inspiration in craft stores, toy stores, party supply stores, building supply stores, your garage, junk drawer, or kids’ toy box—anyplace where unrecognized treasures might be hiding.
- Sources for dental models and listening tubes are listed here:
<http://teachingpronunciation.weebly.com/pronunciation-supplies.html>.

Use your imagination! Many ordinary items can be creative additions to your pronunciation teaching toolbox.

For more ideas on teaching pronunciation: *Beyond Repeat After Me: Teaching Pronunciation to English Learners* by Marla Yoshida. TESOL Press, 2016. ISBN# 9-781942-799467